

## The Record

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# Highlands streams provide area jobs

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Highlands water lets Budweiser tickle the taste bud. It's the creek in the Mountain Creek Waterpark. And it has floated the Gold Coast development boom.

More than 100,000 North Jersey businesses, employing more than 1 million people, rely on the flow of Highlands streams. Yet no one seems to be looking out for their interests amid dire warnings of overstressed water supplies.

As the Highlands Council crafts a regional master plan to protect water-generating areas of the mountain region, it has yet to reach out to downstream water users. And, in turn, it has heard little from commercial water users.

Conducting its own spot survey, The Record found an apparent lack of concern among companies about the vital resource coming out of their taps. Representatives of several companies in downstream towns said they had no opinion about the master plan because -- incorrectly -- they didn't think their water supplies came from the Highlands.

Even businesses in the seven-county Highlands seem uncertain about plans to preserve the water in their back yards.

"What's going on with this regional plan?" Greg Zaccardi, president of High Point Brewing Co. in Butler, asked last week as he brewed beer made with Highlands water that comes from a local reservoir.

"Our business is 95 percent water, so it's a crucial ingredient," said Zaccardi, estimating it takes 5 gallons of water to make a gallon of beer. He said he specifically set up his business in the Highlands because of water quality.

"The rock formation produces soft water," he said. "That's very good for brewing beer."

That's true not only for small brewmasters like Zaccardi, who bottles about 1,500 gallons of Ramstein beer a week.

Anheuser-Busch's Newark plant annually produces 7.5 million barrels of Budweiser and other beer. It has publicly praised the "fresh, pure water from the Wanaque Reservoir to our Newark brewery."

In drumming up support for the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act of 2004, state Sen. Bob Smith, chairman of the Senate Environment Committee, argued that pristine Highlands water is essential for businesses.

"Along with being the source of drinking water for more than 4 million people," Smith said, "the New Jersey Highlands also plays a crucial role in the commercial success of the Garden State."

### Fast facts

Sampler of North Jersey businesses that use water from the Wanaque Reservoir and other Highlands reservoirs and streams:

- Anheuser-Busch, Newark
- Bayonne Military Ocean Terminal redevelopment projects
- Bethwood Caterers, Totowa
- Colgate-Palmolive, Morristown
- Drake's Bakery,

Ken Aiani, environmental coordinator at Drake's bakery in Wayne, echoed those words recently, saying clean water is a key ingredient in Yodels and other cakes made by the bakery's staff.

"We sample the water and we test it. Compared to most areas, it's of the higher quality" he said. But Aiani wasn't sure of the source of Wayne's water supply.

It comes from the Wanaque Reservoir, a few miles upstream in northern Passaic County's Highlands.

Key to economy

"People don't realize where their water comes from," said Colleen DeStefano, deputy executive director of the North Jersey District Water Supply Commission, which operates the reservoir. "They don't understand where the source is."

Yet, she added, "Our water is so important to the economy of the state. Without water, there is no economy, no jobs."

The Wanaque Reservoir serves more than 2 million residential and commercial customers in the counties of Bergen, Passaic, Morris, Essex, Hudson and Union. Its water flows to numerous utilities, including United Water New Jersey and the Passaic Valley Water Commission, serving scores of North Jersey communities.

Other Highlands reservoirs and rivers serve central New Jersey including Trenton, and towns across the Highlands.

In Vernon, for instance, local streams provide Mountain Creek's water park and ski operations, Sussex County's largest employer, about 200 million gallons of water annually.

The Highlands plan proposes growth limits on towns in the region based on water availability. Highlands Council Chairman John Weingart said some businesses in the Highlands have raised concerns about whether they will be able to expand. Too soon to say, he noted, because the plan is still being worked on.

The council has not heard from big commercial customers outside the Highlands, he said.

"As time goes on, we will need to talk with major users of water" in downstream areas, he added.

Threat to supply

The plan notes Bergen County and Newark heavily tap the Wanaque Reservoir during dry weather. Pointing to North Jersey growth projections, it says burgeoning development could overwhelm the regional water supply system.

In two actions that would affect business, the Highlands Council is weighing conservation measures and it recommended a water-use tax to help fund the purchase of key watershed lands. A legislative bill to tax water users statewide for water system improvements, including Highlands projects, has stalled in the face of

Wayne

- Goya Foods, Secaucus
- Hackensack University Medical Center
- High Point Brewing Co., Butler
- Hoffmann-La Roche, Nutley
- International Trade Center, Mount Olive
- Jersey City waterfront redevelopment projects
- Johanson Manufacturing Corp., Boonton
- Marcal Paper Products, Elmwood Park
- Mountain Creek Waterpark, Vernon
- Nabisco, Fair Lawn
- Paragon Household Products, Clifton
- Reckitt Benckiser, Parsippany
- U.S. Food Products, Teaneck

• Willowbrook Mall, Wayne

*Source: various, including water utility records*



opposition by the New Jersey Business and Industry Association.

George Wilson, an association spokesman, said his group addresses statewide issues and hasn't focused on Highlands regional issues.

Zaccardi the beer-maker says he pays more than enough in taxes, even though he supports preserving the core of the Highlands. "We are heavily burdened with taxes," he said. "Any more taxes, it's less of an incentive to stick around."

Some businesses already are taking action about one aspect of water use: its cost. They have independently instituted conservation measures, says Joseph Bella, executive director of the Passaic Valley Water Commission.

"Conservation efforts are really starting to take effect," he said, cutting average daily use at his utility to 80 million gallons per day from 83 million five years ago. About 10 percent of the utility's water supply is used by industries, he said.

Companies that have cut back include Hoffmann-La Roche's pharmaceutical complex in Nutley. Darien Wilson, a company spokeswoman, said the plant uses about 1 million gallons a day, less than half its use a decade ago.

"As to the Highlands draft regional plan," she said, "the Roche plant resides outside of that area, so the plans and water use restrictions do not directly apply to Roche. However, it appears the state is taking responsible actions through the Highlands Act and the Highlands Master Plan to prevent the degradation and depletion of water resources from the Highlands."

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